Deficiency of rainfall in Rajasthan

3383. SHRI B. S. GNANADESIKAN : Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is fact that there is a deficiency of (-) 64 percent of overall rainfall in the State of Rajasthan;

(b) if so, what are all the relief measures taken; and

(c) whether Government are taking necessary steps to give financial assistance to the State of Rajasthan to overcome this calamity?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF WATER RESOURCES (SHRIMATI BIJOYA CHAKRAVARTY) : (a) During the monsoon period of year 2002 there was deficiency of 64% rainfall in the State of Rajasthan.

(b) Government of Rajasthan started Relief works from 16.08.2002 in drought-affected areas. At present a labour ceiling of 19.65 lac have been fixed and about 55 lac persons are getting employment on 10 days rotation in a month. 4822 fodder depots have been opened to provide fodder at subsidised rates to the cattle owners. 9.51 lac M.T. fodder have been distributed upto March 2003. At present 8.20 lac stray & abandoned cattle are being maintained in cattle camps and Goshalas for which subsidy is being provided. Cattle feed is being provided at subsidised rates for the milch and other useful cattle to protect them from mal-nutrition. Water is being transported through tankers or by Rail to the problematic 3860 villages. Gratuitous relief is being provided to persons who are not able to earn their livelihood by working on relief works. At present 4.60 lac persons are being benefited under this scheme.

(c) Yes, Sir.

Contaminated underground water in Gangetic basin

3384. SHRI K. B. KRISHNA MURTHY : Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES be pleased to state :

(a) whether according to a research study recently published in 'Nature' magazine, more than 449 million residents of the Gangetic basin are exposed to arsenic poisoning through contaminated groundwater;

(b) if so, whether the wells surveyed in the region were found to contain five times more arsenic than the permissible limits and whether a deeper region-wise study has been suggested; and

(c) whether excessive arsenic content in drinking water causes skin lesions and Neurological problems for users and if so, the steps being taken to check the arsenic level?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF WATER RESOURCES (SHRIMATI BIJOYA CHAKRAVARTY) : (a) and (b) The studies conducted by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), under the Ministry of Water Resources indicate occurrence of arsenic beyond permissible limits in shallow ground water (20-80m) in the area in the east of the river Bhagirathi in West Bengal comprising districts of Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, North and South 24 Parganas, Hoogly, Howrah and Bardhwan. The arsenic content in shallow ground water in these areas is sporadic and generally varies from less then 0.005 to 2.95 mg/l. compared to permissible limit of 0.05 mg/l. The study conducted by the CGWB, however, indicate the availability of fresh water in deeper aquifers in the affected areas in West Bengal.

(c) Yes, Sir. Steps taken to check the arsenic level include :—

(i) Government of West Bengal has taken up surface water scheme in Malda and South 24 parganas districts.

(ii) State Government of West Bengal has installed Arsenic Treatment Units at a number of places.

(iii) Construction of Replacement tubewells by Government of West Bengal in Arsenic affected districts.

(iv) CGWB has carried out explorations at 50 nos. of sites in the arsenic affected areas. Out of these, 34 nos. of successful tubewells have been handed over to PHED, Government of West Bengal for piped water supply scheme.

(v) CGWB has implemented Artificial Recharge project to dilute the aresnic contaminated ground water.

(vi) Department of Drinking Water supply has launched programmes with the objective to provide safe-drinking facilities in rural habitations affected by water quality problems like fluorosis, arsenic, nitrate etc.

CGWB is in the process of undertaking studies to find out arsenic in shallow and deeper aquifers, in other parts of the country.